

## 40 Year Reflections on Tour 74

It was some Sunday morning either in late October or early November 1973, and I'd just woken and up and walked into the kitchen, when my house mate, another Dylan fan and another Band fan said to me excitedly, "They just announced on the Radio, Dylan and The Band are going to tour." In my pre-coffee state, I probably replied, "Yeah, right," but he insisted it was the real thing, and soon they announced it on the radio again.

Today, Dylan fans who were born later and start getting anxious if a tour ends and another one isn't announced within a couple of weeks don't understand what it was like back then. Dylan was the man in hiding, and for him to tour with The Band again was a dream, a fantasy unlikely to happen. Along with the news of the tour was a forthcoming new album on a new label, Asylum Records. Then it was going to be on Dylan's own label Ashes And Sand, (the name of his touring company in the '60s) and then it was going to be on Asylum, and then the album was going to be called *Ceremonies of the Horsemen* and then it wasn't. And very soon after the announcement of a new label, just to add to the confusion, Columbia Records rushed out an album called *Dylan* that turned out to be outtakes from what was generally considered at the time his worst album, *Self Portrait* and the songs were all covers, and some tracks were barely mixed. Finally the ad for the tour appeared in the paper. A very plain ad and you had to send a check or a money order to Box Lunch at a post office box. Well, before the ad appeared, the news was out there that the tour was by mail only, and at the time my job at a major record store didn't pay enough to open up a checking account, but a guy I knew slipped me the info a couple of days before the ad appeared, so I could get a money order the day before the mailing date since there were all these little restrictions on getting the tickets. There were three shows in Philly, but I could only afford two, I chose the two evening ones, there was an afternoon show on the first day. The ticket price was eight bucks (for the Philly shows) which at the time was deemed outrageous. I remember driving down to the main post office about 10 miles from my house, timing the trip so I could put the letter in the post office mailbox exactly at midnight or soon after. I was not the only car in line.

I decided to go to the first show with my dad, who had never seen him and who could discuss Dylan as well as anyone, in addition to pointing out innumerable poetic references.

The atmosphere at the Spectrum was beyond excited. With no introduction Dylan and The Band took the stage and went right into

"Rainy Day Women." Dylan had a scarf around his neck and was shouting out the words, the Band was on fire. But it was quite a bit different than when I'd seen Dylan last eight years and three months before. Then it was in a 2,000 seat theater if that. This was a hockey arena with about 20,000 people in attendance. A somewhat rocked up "Lay Lady Lay" that was almost chanted came next, followed by "Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues," where finally it seemed as if Bob Dylan might really be the guy on the stage. A kind of crazy speeded up "It Ain't Me Babe" was followed by "I Don't Believe You" and then Dylan went to the piano for "Ballad Of A Thin Man." It was all fine, but that certain thing Dylan does, that thing that gets you deep inside and doesn't let go wasn't there. Dylan left the stage, and The Band, who I'd seen several times since they started touring in 1969 did a short set starting appropriately enough with "Stage Fright." Dylan returned for three songs, leading off with a rocked up "All Along The Watchtower," that I never felt was paying tribute to Jimi Hendrix, that it was just Dylan and The Band playing "All Along The Watchtower" with short solos from Robbie and Garth, followed by "Leopard- Skin Pill-Box Hat" and his huge surprise hit at the time, "Knockin' On Heaven's Door" with The Band joining him in singing the chorus. With that the show, was starting to get more like it.

Following an intermission, Dylan appeared alone onstage with a white jacket and an acoustic guitar. Still close to shouting but not as loud as with The Band, he went into speedy versions of "The Times, They Are A-Changin'," "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue," and then finally slowing down for my very first "Song To Woody" and "Mr. Tambourine Man."

Then came a new song I thought (for years) was called "Except You." From the opening line, "There's nothin' 'round here that I believe in," I leaned forward. This was what I'd waited years for. For the first time all night, he wasn't just performing but truly singing and getting deep into it. It was followed by "It's Alright Ma," again raced through, but powerful with the audience in the midst of the Watergate scandal going completely crazy at the "Even the President of the United States sometimes must have to stand naked" line.

Dylan left the stage, The Band returned for a four song set, Dylan reappeared and began another new song, "Forever Young." (Planet Waves had not been released yet.) Hearing it for the first time was spooky, with Dylan stretching out the "young" on each chorus, digging deep down. Then came another new song, "Something There Is About You" that took the show to a higher level, which led into a triumphant "Like A Rolling Stone," during which the entire audience

went crazy. After a short break, they returned for another surprise, "Most Likely You Go Your Way," and were gone.

The next night I went back by myself after work. The opening set was the same, but The Band changed their set to include a song they only did in concert, "Loving You Is Sweeter Than Ever." Then after "All Along The Watchtower," Dylan added "The Ballad Of Hollis Brown in a heavy arrangement.

The acoustic set was one song shorter, but opened with "Just Like A Woman" and "Girl From The North Country. Then came a new song, which I'd found out a few days later when *Planet Waves* was finally released called "Wedding Song." It was a long song and in a sense the most poetic song of the night, and when he hit the final line, "I love you more than ever now that the past is gone," it was sung with such fierce intensity the place erupted. That he followed it with "Nobody Except You" was icing on the cake.

When "Nobody Except You," wasn't on *Planet Waves*, I was really annoyed and even more annoyed when it wasn't on the live album, "Before The Flood." By then I'd already begun the great bootleg search for the ultimate copy which continued for decades, and a number of terrible sounding bootlegs.

These days, when I hear boots of the 74 tour, especially if the sound quality is good, I'll come across some fairly amazing things, but often it has more to do with the playing of The Band than Dylan's singing, though every once in awhile a great vocal will pop up.

I left those shows thinking, well, it was good to see him play again. However that would change dramatically a little less than two years later in Hartford, Connecticut.